



NOAA FISHERIES

Office of Protected Resources

One of the following criteria must be met for a marine mammal to be considered “stranded”

- *Dead, whether found on the beach or floating in the water.*
- *Alive on a beach but unable to return to the water.*
- *Alive on a beach and in need of apparent medical attention.*
- *Alive in the water and unable to return to its natural habitat without assistance.*

Additional Information

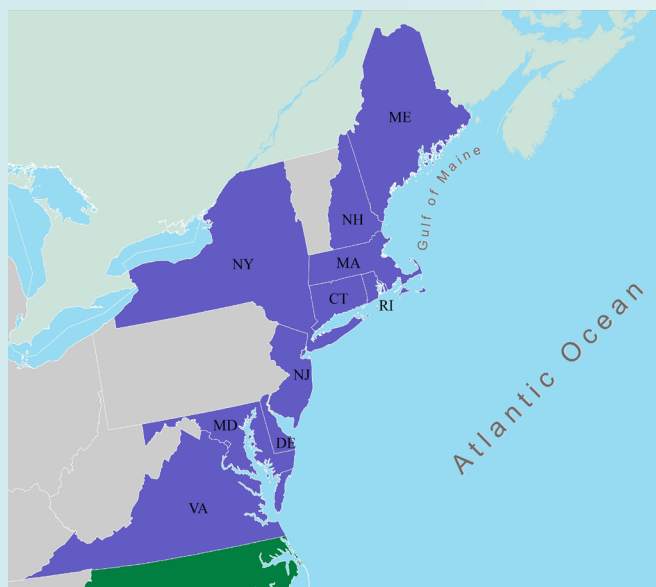
For additional details, please refer to the 2017 National Report of Marine Mammal Strandings in the United States.

Photo (top): Virginia Aquarium responds to a dead stranded fin whale.
Photo: Virginia Aquarium.



2017 Marine Mammal Strandings Overview: Greater Atlantic Region

The U.S. Marine Mammal Stranding Network is comprised of more than 100 organizations from the academic, wildlife rehabilitation, zoo/aquarium, museum, tribe, government, or local emergency response communities authorized to respond to cetaceans (whales, dolphins, and porpoises) and pinnipeds (seals, and sea lions) that are sick, injured, in distress, or dead. These responses are authorized and overseen by NOAA Fisheries’ Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program under the Marine Mammal Protection Act.



Greater Atlantic Region

The NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Region (GAR) includes 10 coastal states from Virginia to Maine (Figure GAR-1). This region encompasses approximately 17,433 miles of coastline in the Northwest Atlantic, and includes large bodies of water such as the Gulf of Maine. The region contains several large major cities (New York, and Boston), busy ports and high traffic areas, in addition to a well visited coastline. The 1,426 confirmed marine mammal strandings in the Greater Atlantic Region in 2017 is similar to its 11-year (2006-2016) average ($n=1,182 \pm 257$).

Figure GAR-1. NOAA Fisheries Greater Atlantic Region.

What Types of Marine Mammals Strand in the GAR?

More than 30 different species of marine mammals can be found in the waters of New England and the Mid-Atlantic states, with the majority of stranding reports involving pinnipeds (Figure GAR-2). Common pinniped species include the harbor (*Phoca vitulina*) and gray (*Halichoerus grypus*) seal (Figure GAR-3). Arctic species, such as the harp (*Pagophilus groenlandicus*) and hooded (*Cystophora cristata*) seal, strand within the region during certain times of the year. Small cetacean species such as the beaked whales (*Ziphiidae* spp.), pilot whales (*Globicephala melas* spp.), bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), and harbor porpoise (*Phocoena phocoena*) are also known to strand. Toothed whales and small cetaceans are highly social species and are at risk of mass stranding. Mass stranding response is a large component of the regional response efforts conducted by the Stranding Network, particularly on Cape Cod—a hot spot for mass stranding events. The region also has many large whale species including blue (*Balaenoptera musculus*), fin (*Balaenoptera physalus*), sei (*Balaenoptera borealis*), right (*Eubalaena glacialis*), humpback (*Megaptera novaeangliae*), minke (*Balaenoptera acutorostrata*), and sperm (*Physeter macrocephalus*) whales.

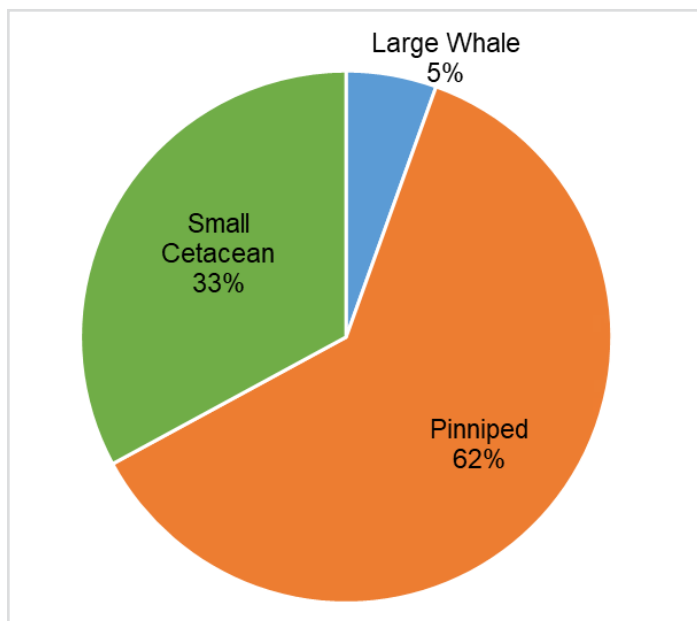


Figure GAR-2. Greater Atlantic Region marine mammal strandings, 2017 (n=1,426). Unknown cetacean (n=7).

Table GAR-1. Five most frequently stranded marine mammal species in the Greater Atlantic Region.

Species	Confirmed Stranding Reports 2017	11-Year Average \pm Standard Deviation ¹ (2006-2016)
Harbor Seal	395	390 \pm 135
Gray Seal	297	165 \pm 49
Short-beaked Common Dolphin	198	119 \pm 91
Bottlenose Dolphin	125	164 \pm 185
Harbor Porpoise	80	62 \pm 31

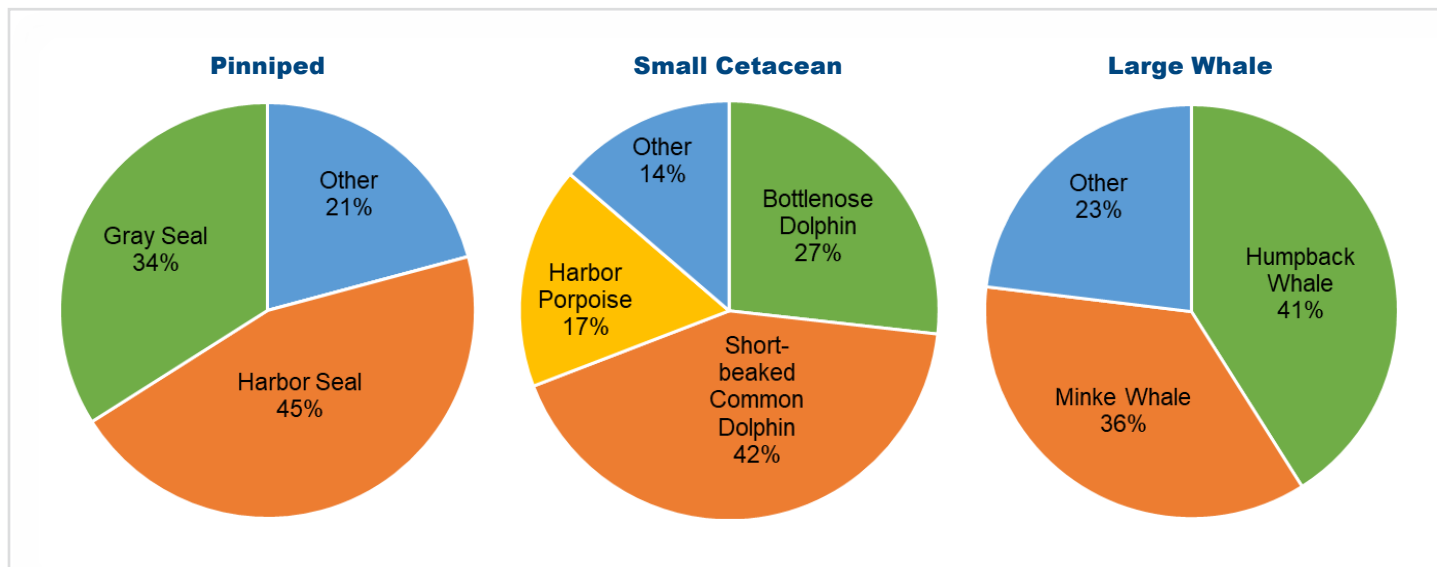


Figure GAR-3. Greater Atlantic Region marine mammal strandings, by species, 2017 (n=1,426). Pinnipeds (n=874), small cetaceans (n=467), large whales (n=78), and unknown cetacean (n=7).

¹ A standard deviation is a measure used to quantify the amount of variation within a set of values.

Are Marine Mammals in the GAR Stranding Alive or Dead?

In 2017, a large proportion (62 percent) of the strandings reported to the network in the Greater Atlantic Region involved dead animals (Figure GAR-4). The Stranding Network tries to gather as much information as they can from examining carcasses and live-stranded animals to better understand the species involved, as well as any population threats or pressures they may be facing. Necropsies provide tissues to help investigate diseases and parasites and provide critical life history information. Stranding response also allows the network to document any human interaction cases such as vessel collisions, entanglements, and fishery interactions. Based on the recommendations of authorized veterinarians or professionals, a handful of live animals were transported to rehabilitation facilities, moved to permanent managed care, or humanely euthanized. Of the animals transferred to rehabilitation facilities in 2017 (n=130), 65 percent (n=85) were released.

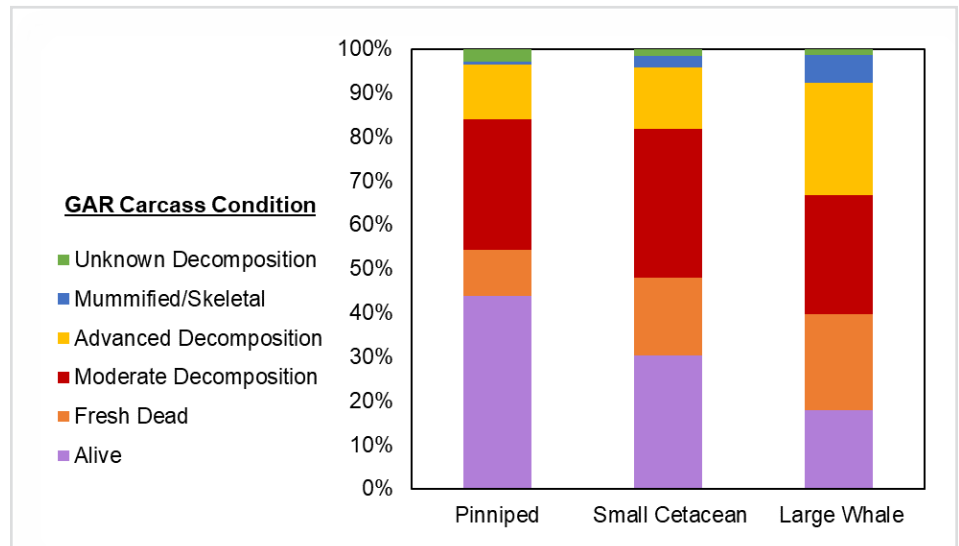


Figure GAR-4. Observation status of confirmed marine mammal strandings in the Greater Atlantic Region, 2017.

When Did GAR Marine Mammals Strand in 2017?

Although marine mammals stranded year-round in the Greater Atlantic Region, stranding events were more frequent in the spring and summer months (Figure GAR-5). There was a large influx of marine mammals during this period, as the Gulf of Maine and the Bay of Fundy provide spring feeding grounds for many resident and migratory species. Different species and age classes stranded at different times of the year. For example, adult and juvenile gray seals typically stranded in the summer months, while young gray seal pups were more likely to strand in the winter during pupping season. Ice seals such as harp and hooded seals have also become more frequent visitors to the area as their range has expanded south.

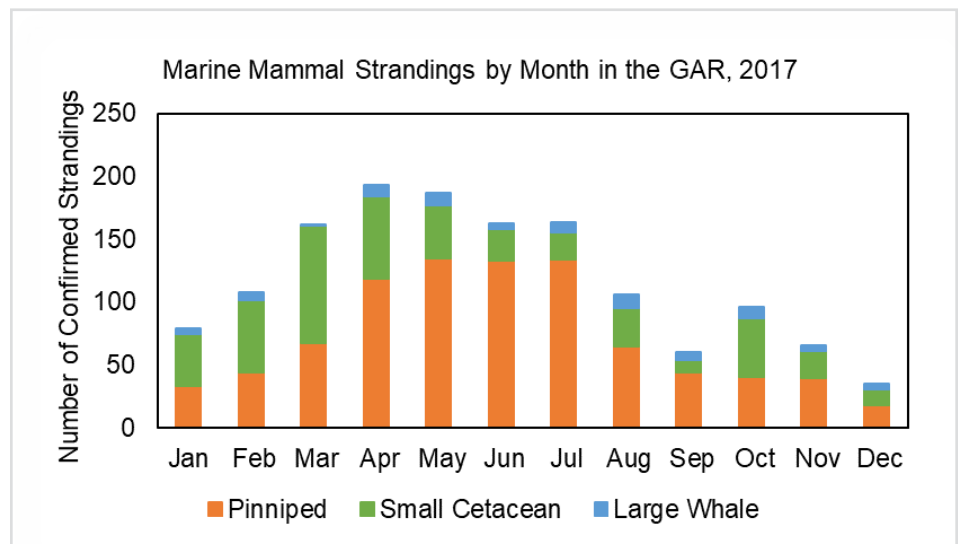


Figure GAR-5. Seasonality of marine mammal strandings in the Greater Atlantic Region, 2017.

What Types of Unusual Mortality Events Were Occurring in the GAR?

There were two large whale Unusual Mortality Events (UMEs) declared in 2017 involving humpback whales and North Atlantic right whales. Elevated numbers of humpback whale mortalities occurred along the Atlantic coast from Maine through Florida. A portion of the whales showed evidence of pre-mortem vessel strike; however, this finding was not consistent across all humpback whales examined. In 2017, elevated numbers of North Atlantic right whale mortalities were documented, primarily in Canada and some in the United States, which necessitated an UME declaration, especially given the critically endangered status of the population. Preliminary findings indicate human interactions, specifically vessel strikes or entanglements as the cause of death for the majority of the North Atlantic right whales. More information about UMEs is available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/national/marine-mammal-protection/marine-mammal-unusual-mortality-events>.

What Can Members of the Public Do?



Harbor seal
rehabilitated at
Mystic Aquarium in
Connecticut. Photo:
Mystic Aquarium.

Greater Atlantic Regional 24/7 Hotline

The Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Program relies on reports of stranded marine mammals by the public. If you come across a stranded marine mammal please report it to your Greater Atlantic regional 24/7 hotline.

Hotline: (866) 755-6622

Reporting a Stranding

The most important information to collect includes the:

- Date
- Location of stranding (including latitude and longitude)
- Number of animals
- Condition of the animal (alive or dead), and
- Species (if known)

Photos or videos (from a safe and legal distance) can also provide valuable information to network responders. Only trained and permitted responders should approach or pick up a stranded marine mammal. You can also download the Dolphin & Whale 911 Stranding App in the Apple Store to help report a stranding.

Getting Involved

The National Stranding Network relies on government, private, and public support to conduct its vital work to save animals in distress and understand causes of injuries and mortalities. You can make a difference by contacting your local Stranding Network (list available at: <https://www.fisheries.noaa.gov/report>) to see how you can get involved.

*Only trained and
permitted responders
should approach or
pick up a stranded
marine mammal.*

Only confirmed stranding activities involving species under the jurisdiction of NOAA Fisheries (cetaceans and pinnipeds, except walrus) are used in this report. All data were taken from the National Stranding Database and filtered accordingly. Any duplicate events, and entries of entangled large whales, were removed from the following analyses. All data and information described within this report are correct as of October 25, 2019. All photographs were taken under Stranding Agreement, Section 109(h) authority, or permit.



U.S. Secretary of Commerce
Gina Raimondo

Acting Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere
Benjamin Friedman

Acting Assistant Administrator for
Fisheries
Dr. Paul Doremus

March 2021

www.fisheries.noaa.gov

OFFICIAL BUSINESS

National Marine Fisheries
Service
Office of Protected Resources 1315
East-West Highway
Silver Spring, MD, 20910